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Evaluation of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy

Employment and Social Development Canada
Emploi et Développement social Canada

Canada

Evaluation of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy

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List of acronyms

CAB	Community Advisory Board
ESDC	Employment and Social Development Canada
HIFIS	Homeless Individuals and Families Information System
LGBTQ2S	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two-Spirit
NHIS	National Homelessness Information System

Executive summary

The Homelessness Partnering Strategy is designed to prevent and reduce homelessness by providing direct support and funding to community entities across Canada, who in turn, provide project funding to local community agencies. With annual funding of approximately $100M, it is a community-based program with multiple streams. The program funds local priorities identified by communities through a comprehensive planning process involving Community Advisory Boards. Communities also receive resources to address homelessness from various partners, including significant funding amounts from provinces and territories.

As of fiscal year 2014 to 2015 (April 1 to March 31), the program has emphasized the implementation of a Housing First approach that focuses on stable housing as a priority for those experiencing chronic or episodic homelessness. Additionally, the program continues to address short-term and/or provisional homelessness through non-Housing First programs. The Housing First approach is associated with a host of positive outcomes, such as increased housing stability, cost effectiveness, improved community functioning and quality of life. The overall program design contributes to improving access for Canadians struggling with homelessness. At the same time, the program design emphasizes the importance of flexibility and local solutions through the requirements for Community Advisory Boards to plan local initiatives, which are then delivered by community entities.

The evaluation questions were designed to assess the program's progress in implementation including communication and coordination, monitoring and reporting and adherence to Housing First principles, and early outcomes such as housing placements and stability, financial stability and self-sufficiency. This evaluation examines the first two years of the 2014 to 2019 funding cycle, which represent the formal adoption of the Housing First approach. The evaluation questions and related methodologies were approved by the then Departmental Evaluation Committee in January, 2016. The program in the Province of Quebec operates under a different model, and thus, was not included in the current evaluation.

Key findings from the evaluation indicate that within the resources available and through extensive partnering, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy is addressing some of the highest priority needs of the homeless in Canada. The program's primary focus on the chronic and episodic homeless aligns with those who are the heaviest users of the emergency shelter system. This primary focus is balanced with flexibility in some areas of the design to include approaches outside of the Housing First approach, which directly link to communities' priorities with other populations that experience homelessness. The program's design addresses many of the contributing factors to homelessness and areas of specific need, including supporting approaches to addressing systemic and

societal barriers to housing, provision of housing supports, and accessing health and social services within communities. The challenge with lack of affordable housing in many communities is beyond the scope of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy and the mandate of Employment and Social Development Canada, but remains a considerable barrier to addressing homelessness in communities.

Need for the program

There is a strong continued need for a partnering strategy that supports the integrated efforts of communities using new approaches to address issues of homelessness, which remains a widespread and ongoing issue across Canada. During the period from 2010 to 2014, it was estimated that 450,000 Canadians used an emergency shelter.[1] Recently, there has been a reduction in the number of shelter users (based on estimates of 156,000 in 2005 falling to 137,000 in 2014). However, the actual number of emergency shelter nights ("bed nights") used has increased by 300,000 during the same period.[2] This indicates that a smaller group of people are using emergency shelters for longer periods. The program's primary focus is on the chronic and episodic homeless, who are the heaviest users of the emergency shelter system.

Coordinated, ongoing efforts have occurred over the past 20 years to address homelessness in Canada. However, there remain considerable challenges, particularly regarding chronic and episodic homelessness, and vulnerable groups (e.g., youth, women and children, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two-Spirit, and Indigenous people). Chronic homelessness is defined as when those who are currently homeless have been homeless for six months or more in the past year, while episodic homelessness is defined as when individuals who are currently homeless have experienced three or more episodes of homelessness in the previous year.

A gender-based analysis plus lens[3] was applied to the current evaluation and indicated that the needs of vulnerable socio-demographic groups are supported to some extent through Housing First programming. For instance, women comprise 30% of the chronic or episodic shelter users, and women head nearly 90% of families using emergency shelters. The percentage of chronic shelter users who are children is 13%, and this number indicates chronic shelter use by families.

In addition to gender, homelessness is differentiated by Indigenous status. Shelter use among Indigenous women is 10% higher than for non-Indigenous

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[1] A. Segaert, The National Shelter Study: Emergency Shelter Use in Canada 2005-2009 (Ottawa, ON: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2012).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Gender-Based Analysis Plus is an analytical tool used to assess how diverse groups of women, men and gender-diverse people may experience policies, programs and initiatives. The "plus" acknowledges that it goes beyond biological (sex) and socio-cultural (gender) differences and also considers many other identity factors, like race, ethnicity, religion, age, and mental or physical disability.

women. Violence within the household is a precursor to homelessness for one in four homeless women, and Indigenous women experience the highest rates of gender-based violence in Canada,[4] and may be more vulnerable to homelessness.

Research on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two-Spirit (LGBTQ2S) homelessness is emerging and indicates that among youth there is an overrepresentation of LGBTQ2S individuals.[5] Moreover, this sub-population of adults have specialized needs, such as support for housing, along with support for substance abuse, mental health, and identity development from a trauma-informed care approach.[6]

Implementation

Evaluation evidence indicates that implementation of the Housing First approach has progressed well over the initial two years of the program. Specifically, the increasing adherence to Housing First principles (i.e., via fidelity scores) demonstrates improvements in the implementation of this new approach. The 28 communities that rated themselves on alignment with the core principles (see Section 1.2), and the Big 8 communities that had implementation targets during this period showed overall improvement on the fourteen principles. The two principles on which they scored most highly were "service choice" and "integrated housing". In contrast "reasonable cost for housing" had the lowest score across all communities in both 2014 to 2015 and 2015 to 2016.

Contributing factors that facilitated implementation were identified by key informants interviewed and case studies conducted. In particular, they included: the program's design emphasis on community planning and collaboration, readiness projects and transition timing, the extent to which Housing First had already been implemented in some communities, and acceptance of the Housing First approach in many communities.

Communication and coordination within the program is functioning well across individual, program, and organizational levels. Some of this coordination is occurring at the individual client level as in the case of intensive case management working with community nurses, health clinics and hospital discharge programs. In other cases, the coordination is occurring at the program level. For example, the coordination of rent assistance programs from the province or territory with emergency housing funds supplied in whole or part through program funding. As well, the evaluation found numerous examples of coordination and integration at the organizational level focusing on multiple

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[4] S. Perreault, Criminal Victimization in Canada, 2014 (Report No. 85-002-X). (Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada, 2015).

[5] J. Ecker, "Queer, Young, and Homeless: A Review of the Literature, "Child & Youth Services 37, no. 4 (2016): 325 to 361.; I.A. Abramovich, "No Safe Place to Go-LGBTQ Youth Homelessness in Canada: Reviewing the Literature," Canadian Journal of Family and Youth/Le Journal Canadien de Famille et de la Jeunesse 4, no. 1(2012): 29 to 51.

[6] J. Ecker, LGBTQ2S Adult Housing Needs Assessment (Ottawa, ON: Daybreak Non Profit Housing, 2017).

programs and services such as collaborations between youth housing organizations, employment centres and outreach organizations.

There are numerous groups and units involved with different aspects of the program, which can present challenges. The program's requirements for monitoring and reporting are perceived by some communities as burdensome as they are not aligned with other partners' requirements. Other noted challenges included the perceived rapid roll-out of the approach, ambitious targets, and continued lack of affordable housing in many communities. To some extent these issues are being addressed through the development and/or maintenance of various communication and coordination mechanisms, such as Community Advisory Board meetings, e-mails, regular and timely reporting, newsletters and forums on best practices.

Early outcomes

At this early stage, the program has surpassed its target of placing 3,000 people in longer-term stable housing by 2015 to 2016. Administrative data indicates that in that year over 6,000 people were placed in stable housing. One-third (33%) were placed in permanent housing within 30 days. Another one-fifth of clients (20%) were placed between 31 and 60 days. Overall, approximately three-quarters of clients were placed within 90 days (73%).

In addition to housing placement, the program aims to support individuals to achieve housing stability. Among clients who were still in the program (i.e. continuing to receive services) at the six-month mark, approximately 60% were in stable housing in 2014 to 2015, and 77% in 2015 to 2016. A small proportion at the six-month mark had successfully exited the program where individuals have demonstrated the ability to maintain stable housing and the individual requires less intensive supports and services. Clients who had successfully left the program by the six-month mark included 19% in 2014 to 2015 and 7% in 2015 to 2016.[7]

At the 12-month mark, for which only 2015 to 2016 data are available, 41% of Housing First clients were in stable housing and 43% had successfully exited the program. In addition to the Housing First projects' early accomplishments, the program also provided housing placements to over 10,000 non-Housing First clients in 2014 to 2015 and 2015 to 2016.

The program is demonstrating early positive contributions towards increasing the financial stability and self-sufficiency of homeless clients using a Housing First approach as well as non-Housing ones. For example, across the two years evaluated, 4,541 clients supported by the program experienced an improvement

[7] Successfully exiting from the program indicates stable housing at time of exit; however it is not possible to measure ongoing housing stability after this point. As a result, there should be some caution used in assuming that the sum of the two measures (stable housing in program + successful exit from program) is a completely accurate measure of those in stable housing overall at a specific milestone (e.g., six-months, 12-months).

in their employment status with approximately one-half of clients (49%) moved from no employment into full-time employment. During the same period, 3,401 clients started a job training program, and 2,566 clients started an educational program. Additionally, in 2015 to 2016, 8% of Housing First clients were reported as having engaged in volunteer work and 13% began an educational program or employment skills training. Another important positive change for Housing First clients in 2015 to 2016 was that almost one-half of them (46%) experienced positive changes in social participation, and one-third (32%) engaged in recreation or cultural programs and services.

With these early indications of positive outcomes, the program is anticipated to meaningfully contribute to the ultimate outcome of preventing and reducing homelessness in Canada. Future research and evaluation will continue to monitor progress on outcomes such as housing placements, housing stability over time, successful exits from the program, and financial stability and self-sufficiency using national data collection tools.

Recommendations

Following from the evaluation findings, three recommendations have been developed.

1) Increase flexibility under Housing First to enable the provision of Housing First interventions to a greater proportion of the homeless population beyond the episodically and chronically homeless.

2) Further promote the participation of diverse groups on Community Advisory Boards, such as the private sector, police and correction services, landlord associations and individuals with lived experience/experiential knowledge of homelessness.

3) Review reporting requirements in order to reduce the burden on communities to gather the necessary information to monitor and measure performance.

Management response

The program welcomes the findings of the evaluation which underline its relevance and the overall effectiveness of the community-based approach to preventing and reducing homelessness across Canada.

The program's current five-year cycle ends in 2018 to 2019. As part of the National Housing Strategy, $2.2 Billion over ten years has been announced for the extension of the program. By 2021 to 2022, this will nearly double the investments made in 2015 to 2016. The next program cycle is scheduled to start April 1st, 2019.

New program policy direction for the program is under development. The evaluation sheds light on specific areas for review and improvement which will be beneficial to, and support, the renewal of the program along with recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Homelessness as well as engagement with provinces and territories, and Indigenous partners.

Recommendations and responses

1) Increase flexibility under Housing First to enable the provision of Housing First interventions to a greater proportion of the homeless population beyond the episodically and chronically homeless.

The Department is committed to supporting communities in addressing local homelessness challenges.

While all demographic groups (men, women, youth, Indigenous persons, veterans, etc.) can currently be served under Housing First if they meet the definition of chronic or episodic homelessness, the program's client eligibility requirements for Housing First services are seen as restrictive. For example, specific vulnerable populations that have complex needs like youth leaving care and women fleeing violence often do not qualify for Housing First interventions. This finding is consistent with what was heard throughout the consultation process led by the Advisory Committee on Homelessness.

The renewal of the program presents an opportunity to explore ways to better serve vulnerable populations with complex needs who do not meet the current chronic and episodic definition.

Action proposed

- In preparation for the next cycle of the program (scheduled to start April 1st, 2019), the Department will identify ways to provide more flexibility to communities to develop and implement local homelessness responses that better meet the needs of vulnerable populations.

2) Further promote the participation of diverse groups on community advisory boards, such as the private sector, police and correction services, landlord associations and individuals with lived experience/experiential knowledge of homelessness.

The Department agrees with this recommendation. While it is the Community Entities that are responsible for administering federal funding (outside of Quebec), the program requires that Community Advisory Boards (CABs) be established. CABs are comprised of volunteer representatives that have no financial relationship with the Government of Canada but advise the Community Entity and can guide both program implementation and broader homelessness responses within the community. A well-functioning Community Advisory Board (CAB) identifies and engages with key players in the community and builds strong connections across programs and services that target the homeless in a given community.

While there are currently no specific requirements for CAB composition, the program encourages communities to have broad representation. For example, the program's directives encourage communities to include persons with lived experience of homelessness in the membership of their CAB and highlight key benefits to the community.

In 2015 to 2016, recognizing the importance of well-functioning CABs, the Department developed a CAB governance series that includes guides to coordinating partnerships, accountability, working with community entities, response and results-based services and CAB governance (including desired membership). Furthermore, as part of the Community Plan Annual Update process, the Department recently improved the collection method for CAB composition to enable a more accurate picture of the level of representation from key sectors, including police and corrections services, landlords and people with lived experience.

Actions proposed

In preparation for the next cycle of the program (scheduled to start April 1st, 2019), the Department will:

- Develop a new Directive on CAB composition to clarify federal expectations in this regard; and,
- raise awareness within communities of federal expectations with regard to CAB composition.

The Department will also continue to monitor the evolution of CAB composition annually.

3) Review reporting requirements in order to reduce the burden on communities and gather the necessary information to monitor and measure performance.

The Department agrees with this recommendation and recognizes that the level of monitoring and reporting of the program is high and contributes to administrative burden.

The Department requires two types of reporting under the program: contribution agreement monitoring reporting and performance monitoring reporting. Agreement monitoring reporting is required for the oversight of contribution agreements by Service Canada and is essential to ensure adequate stewardship of public funds. Performance monitoring reporting is required to assess the overall performance of the program, inform program policy development, and support research into new and innovative approaches to preventing and reducing homelessness.

While both types of reporting are essential, there is a clear need to streamline reporting processes and report content, particularly in recognition that the Government of Canada is but one funder of homelessness supports and services.

Actions proposed

In preparation for the next cycle of the program (scheduled to start April 1st, 2019), the Department will:

- Map all current federal reporting requirements with a view to identify redundancies and streamline processes;
- Review the Performance Measurement Strategy in advance of the next cycle of the program to ensure it contributes to a streamlining of federal reporting requirements; and,
- Identify opportunities to lessen administrative burden more generally, such as through the leveraging of partnerships (with recipients, provinces and territories or other stakeholders) and reporting systems.

1. Introduction

Across Canada, homelessness is a complex socio-economic issue that is challenging to address. This significant social problem became more pronounced in the 1980s due to economic changes combined with reductions in affordable housing and other social services. Since 1999, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) has been actively supporting communities to address homelessness issues starting with the National Homelessness Initiative in 1999, followed in 2007 by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy.

The Homelessness Partnering Strategy is designed to prevent and reduce homelessness by providing direct support and funding to communities across Canada (see logic model in Appendix 1). With annual expenditures of $99.2M in fisal year 2014 to 2015 (April 1 to March 31) and $104.2M in 2015 to 2016, it is a community-based program with multiple streams. Communities also receive funding to address homelessness from various other partners including significant amounts from provinces and territories. Local priorities are identified by communities through a comprehensive planning process involving Community Advisory Boards composed of various stakeholders. The program operates under a different model in the Province of Quebec.[8]

As of 2014 to 2015, the program has newly emphasized the implementation of a Housing First approach that focuses on stable housing as a priority for those experiencing chronic or episodic homelessness. To inform policy direction and support program renewal, the present evaluation concentrated on progress made in implementing the Housing First approach and early results. It was conducted at this particular point to provide timely feedback on the program design change following its initial roll-out. The Homelessness Partnering Strategy logic model identifies the direct or immediate outcomes expected from the program's activities.

The current evaluation used multiple sources of information and data gathering methods to address the evaluation questions (see Appendix 2):

1) To what extent is there a need for the federal government to support communities to prevent and reduce homelessness, especially among the chronically and episodically homeless?
2) To what extent is the Homelessness Partnering Strategy effectively designed and delivered?
3) Are Designated Communities implementing a Housing First approach?
4) Are multiple stakeholders (e.g. provinces/territories, municipalities, voluntary sector, private sector, etc.) engaged to address homelessness?

[8] After discussions under the Canada-Quebec Agreement, it was determined that Quebec would not be required to collect evaluation data. Therefore, the report presents results for all other provinces and territories of Canada.

5) Are programs and services in Designated Communities coordinated to reduce homelessness?
6) To what extent have community-level homelessness priorities been addressed?
7) To what extent does the Homelessness Partnering Strategy contribute to an enhanced understanding of homelessness?
8) Has Homelessness Partnering Strategy contributed to housing stability for homeless individuals and those at imminent risk of becoming homeless?
9) Has Homelessness Partnering Strategy contributed to economic stability and self-sufficiency for homeless individuals and those at imminent risk of becoming homeless?
10) Has Homelessness Partnering Strategy contributed to the prevention and reduction of homelessness?
11) Has the Homelessness Partnering Strategy implemented strategies to minimize administrative processes and resource expenditures while maximizing achievement of outcomes?

A description of the methods employed (literature review, administrative file and data review, key informant interviews with both internal and external stakeholders, and community case studies) and their limitations are included in Appendix 3.

1.1 Background and context

Under the program, funding is available through three streams delivered regionally focusing on the needs of those at the local level who are homeless and at imminent risk of homelessness. At the national level, three funding streams that accounted for less than 2% of the program spending in 2014 to 2015 and 2015 to 2016 are designed to complement the regional funding streams.

Regional funding

Designated Communities Stream – Most funded projects are delivered through a Community Entity model. Under this model, the Community Entity, which is normally an incorporated organization such as a municipal government or an established not-for-profit organization, enters into a funding agreement with ESDC. The Community Entity is responsible for the implementation of the community plan, to solicit project proposals, approve projects, contract and monitor all agreements with third-party service providers, report on its activities and disbursements, collect and share data and information and report on the results. In 2014 to 2015 and 2015 to 2016, this stream accounted for approximately 80% of program spending.

Priorities for addressing homelessness in the community are identified through a planning process led by a Community Advisory Board. It is typically composed of officials from all levels of government, community stakeholders, and the private

and voluntary sectors. The Board plays a key role in encouraging partnerships, coordinating community efforts related to homelessness, integrating the efforts with those of the province or territories, and recommending projects for approval by the Community Entity.

Aboriginal Homelessness Stream – Most funded projects address the specific needs of the off-reserve homeless Indigenous population by supporting an integrated service delivery system that is culturally appropriate and community-driven. The program partners with Indigenous groups to ensure that services meet the needs of off-reserve homeless Indigenous people in cities and rural areas. The specialized needs of all First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and non-status Indians are also considered. Off-reserve Indigenous people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are also served under the Designated Communities and Rural and Remote homelessness funding streams. In 2014 to 2015 and 2015 to 2016, the Aboriginal Homelessness Stream accounted for approximately 14% of program spending.

Rural and Remote Homelessness Stream[9] – Funding from this stream is available to all non-Designated Communities, which include any communities outside of the 61 that receive funding through the Designated Communities stream. Projects have to address a need in the community and have broad community support in order to be considered for funding. In 2014 to 15 and 2015 to 2016, this accounted for approximately 5% of program spending.

National funding streams

The National Homelessness Information System (NHIS) is a federal data development initiative designed to collect and analyze baseline data related primarily to the use of emergency shelters in Canada. This funding stream supports the implementation and deployment of the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) software, software training at the community level, and projects related to community shelter data coordination. Data collected from various sources feed into the NHIS to help develop a national portrait of homelessness.

The NHIS funding stream is designed to support the development of partnerships within Homelessness Partnering Strategy communities to collect data on individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. An important component of NHIS is the HIFIS which allows coordination among the entire spectrum of homelessness-related services. HIFIS is a tool designed to support service providers' operational capacity and collect information on clients using their services. From outreach to case management and from shelters to long-term housing support, approximately 400 service providers currently use HIFIS. The data and the information are used to conduct research on the various

[9] After Budget 2016 the Rural and Remote stream was made more flexible and open to all non-Designated Communities, rather than prioritizing those with populations of less than 25,000.

aspects of homelessness in Canada to help develop knowledge and understanding with the objective to prevent and reduce homelessness.

The **Innovative Solutions to Homelessness** supports the development of innovative approaches to reducing homelessness. Funding can be used to support activities in three key areas: community-based innovative projects to reduce homelessness and/or the cost of homelessness; building strategic partnerships with key stakeholders; and testing and/or sharing tools, social metrics, and research findings geared towards homelessness.

The **Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative** makes surplus federal real properties available to eligible recipients for projects to help prevent and reduce homelessness. Eligible projects can include investments in transitional, permanent supportive, longer-term housing and related support and emergency services.

1.2 Recent changes to the program

Several strategies to reduce homelessness have been implemented in Canada over the last decades, often focused on short-term emergency services, rather than rehabilitation and reintegration into the community. The National Homelessness Initiative implemented in 1999, focused on emergency shelters. With the launch of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy in 2007 there was an increased emphasis placed on transitional housing and housing supports, and many communities focused on moving people out of emergency shelters and into more stable housing. This was further confirmed in 2014, with the program integrating a Housing First approach framed by six fundamental principles.

1. **Rapid housing with supports**: This involves directly helping clients locate and secure permanent housing as rapidly as possible and assisting them with moving in or re-housing if needed.

2. **Offering clients choice in housing**: Clients must be given choice in terms of housing options as well as the services they wish to access.

3. **Separating housing provision from other services**: Acceptance of any services is not a requirement for accessing or maintaining housing, but clients must be willing to accept regular visits.

4. **Providing tenancy rights and responsibilities**: Clients are required to contribute a portion of their income towards rent, and communities cultivate strong relationships with landlords in both the private and public sectors.

5. **Integrating housing into the community**: In order to respond to client choice, minimize stigma and encourage client social integration, more attention

should be given to scattered-site housing in the public or private rental markets.

6. **Strength-based and promoting self-sufficiency**: The focus is on strengthening and building on the skills and abilities of the client, based on self-determined goals, which could include employment, education, social integration, improvements to health or other goals that will help to stabilize the client's situation and lead to self-sufficiency.

While some communities had adopted a Housing First approach either fully or in part prior to 2014, the decision to implement this approach widely represented a shift in direction for other communities. This shift towards a Housing First approach was designed to be undertaken in a manner that maintained balance and flexibility with other non-Housing First approaches employed by communities to continue to address local priorities. To give those communities not already familiar with the Housing First approach time to prepare for the changes, fiscal year 2014 to 2015 was designated as a transition year to allow them to complete projects from the previous funding cycle and to prepare for a Housing First approach.

As of 2015 to 2016, expectations were that within larger communities, a minimum of 65% of Strategy funding was allocated towards Housing First activities, while other Designated Communities and Indigenous communities with allocations over $200K were expected to have 40% go to Housing First activities by 2016 to 2017 as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Funding allocation targets, 2016 to 2017

Membership categories	Housing First	Non-Housing First
Large Communities	65%	35%
Designated Communities and Indigenous $200K+	40%	60%
Less than $200K Designated Communities in Territories	No targets set	

The target population for the Housing First approach is individuals who are chronically and episodically homeless. The program defines the chronically homeless population as those who are currently homeless and have been homeless for six months or more in the past year (i.e., have spent more than 180 cumulative nights in a shelter or place not fit for human habitation). Episodic homelessness is defined as when individuals who are currently homeless have experienced three or more episodes of homelessness in the previous year.

The program focuses on moving clients as rapidly as possible from the street or emergency shelters into permanent housing with supports that vary according to clients' needs. Supports are provided by case management teams and/or case managers who serve as main points of contact for clients from assessment through to follow-up. According to program criteria, only after a community has housed 90% of its chronically and episodically homeless populations can it focus its Housing First interventions on other groups in the community, such as those in transitional housing or otherwise not fitting the chronic or episodic definitions.

The program design continues to support projects for populations that do not fall under the definition of chronic and episodic homelessness through the portion of Designated Communities funding not specifically targeted for Housing First projects. In particular, non-Housing First funding accounted for: 35% for large communities, 60% for communities with allocations over $200K, any of the communities with allocation under $200K, as well as the funding not allocated to specific communities under the Aboriginal funding stream, and Rural and remote communities funding stream.

2. Alignment of the program

2.1 Homelessness in Canada

There are fewer Canadians using emergency shelters, but those who do are staying longer than before resulting in increased counts of "bed nights". The program's primary focus is on the chronic and episodic homeless who are the heaviest users of the emergency shelter system, and as a result, those who are contributing to the increasing trend in bed nights.

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness defines homelessness as "the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it".[10] This refers to a wide range of living arrangements, such as living on the street, staying in an emergency shelter, or being provisionally housed under precarious or vulnerable conditions.

Despite various efforts, there remain considerable challenges in understanding the full magnitude of homelessness in Canada, particularly considering the various types of living arrangements. Regarding trends in use of emergency shelters, the best available estimates are derived from the 2005 to 2014 National Shelter Study.[11] Since 2005 there has been a 12% downward trend in the number of shelter users based on estimates of 156,000 in 2005 falling to 137,000

[10] S. Gaetz et al., The State of Homelessness in Canada 2016 (Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, 2016).
[11] A. Segaert, The National Shelter Study: Emergency Shelter Use in Canada 2005-2009 (Ottawa, ON: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2012).

in 2014. However, the actual number of total emergency shelter nights ("bed nights") used has increased in this same time period. In 2014, there were 300,000 more bed nights used in emergency shelters when compared with 2005. This means that a smaller group of people are using emergency shelters for longer periods.

2.2 Homeless populations

The homeless population is composed of various groups and sub-groups with different characteristics and needs. Through its shift to Housing First, the program prioritizes the chronically and episodically homeless while continuing through non-Housing First programs to serve those who are experiencing short-term homelessness and/or are provisionally accommodated.

Demographic information about homeless sub-populations

Chronic and episodic homelessness

- Chronic homeless: six months or more in the past year spent in a shelter or place not fit for human habitation.
- Episodic homelessness: experienced three or more episodes of homelessness in the previous year.
- Requirement for intensive support to access/maintain suitable housing and other services.[12]
- Fully, 10% of shelter users are chronic or episodic.[13]
- Chronic or episodic population breakdown by age: 13.6% youth, 7.5% children, 50.8% adults, 23.9% older adults, 4.2% seniors. Additionally, this sub-population is 70.1% male, 29.5% female, and 27.3% Indigenous.[14]
- There are some indications in the literature of disproportionately higher bed night usage. Study on administrative shelter data found that episodic and longer-stay users in Ottawa and Toronto occupied over half the beds during a four-year period, but comprised only 12 to 13% of the homeless population, meaning the episodic and long-stay homeless use the majority of emergency shelter services available while being a small proportion of the overall homeless population. This study found that when the multiple years are taken into account, the proportion of the homeless population that is chronic or episodic is estimated in the 10 to 15% range.[15]

[12] A. Segaert, The National Shelter Study: Emergency Shelter Use in Canada 2005-2009 (Ottawa, ON: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2012).
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] T. Aubry et al., "Identifying the Patterns of Emergency Shelter Stays of Single Individuals in Canadian Cities of Different Sizes," Housing Studies 28, no. 6 (2013): 910 to 927.

Figure 1. Percentage of chronic and episodic shelter users by gender from 26+ communities in 2016

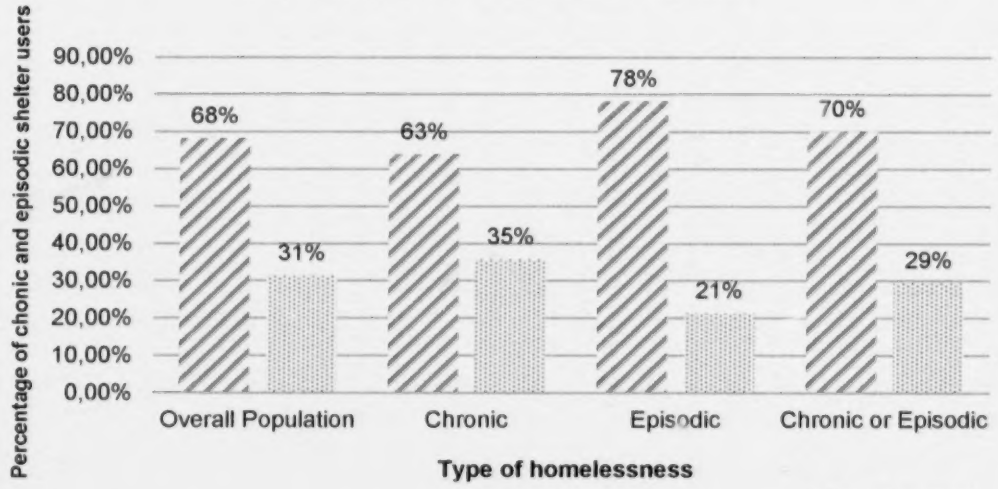
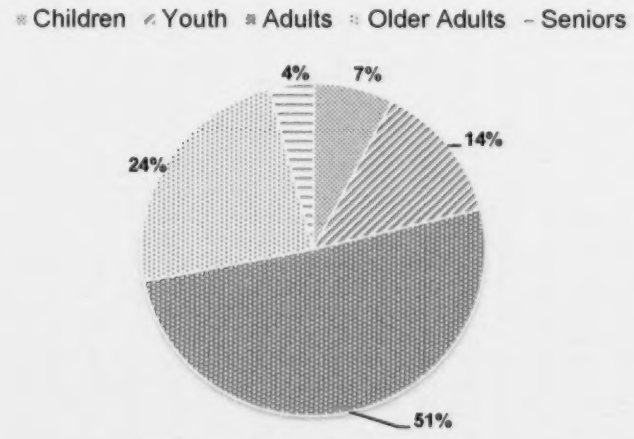


Figure 2. Percentage of chronic and episodic shelter users by age from 26+ communities in 2016



Sources for Figures 1 and 2: National Homelessness Database, which contains administrative shelter data obtained from emergency shelters using the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) and similar data obtained from the City of Toronto, Province of Alberta and BC Housing.

Military veteran homelessness

- The National Shelter study reported that 2.2% of shelter users – approximately 2,950 individuals – reported having served in the military.[16]

[16] A. Segaert, The National Shelter Study: Emergency Shelter Use in Canada 2005-2009 (Ottawa, ON: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2012).

- Another shelter study focusing on veteran homeless found that 2.7% of annual shelter users were identified as veterans, and estimated that 2,250 veterans use homeless shelters each year in Canada.[17]

Indigenous homelessness

- Indigenous people are over-represented in the population of shelter users at 21.4% which is a significantly higher proportion than the Indigenous population in many urban communities. Within the chronically and episodically homeless population, Indigenous people represent 27.3%. Indigenous shelter users were far more likely to experience episodic shelter use than non-Indigenous shelter users, and overall, the rate of shelter use for Indigenous people was 10 times higher than for non-Indigenous people.[18]
- Key informants identified a variety of reasons that put the Indigenous population at risk of becoming homeless, such as racism, lack of education, lack of employment opportunities, and the consequences of the residential school system.
- Key informants for the evaluation noted that many Indigenous people migrate to urban centres due to a lack of housing and/or employment in their home communities, or to access health services, but then find it challenging to find employment, and have adequate income to support themselves, and to obtain housing in their new community.

Rural and Remote homelessness

- Rural homeless populations are more likely to be provisionally housed under precarious or vulnerable conditions rather than use emergency shelters, and this makes them less visible than the urban homeless population.[19]

Youth homelessness

- Youth who may be more vulnerable to homelessness include Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two-Spirit (LGBTQ2S) youth; youth escaping violence and abuse; newcomer youth; youth exiting social care; Indigenous youth; and youth who have been involved with the criminal justice system.[20]
- Youth are less likely to be chronically or episodically homeless as they represent only 13.6% of the chronic or episodic homeless population, while representing 16.5% of the total homeless population.[21]

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[17] A. Segaert, The Extent and Nature of Veteran Homelessness in Canada (Ottawa, ON: Employment and Social Development Canada, 2015).
[18] A. Segaert, The National Shelter Study: Emergency Shelter Use in Canada 2005-2009 (Ottawa, ON: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2012).
[19] J.W. Schiff, R. Schiff, and A.Turner, "Rural Homelessness in Western Canada: Lessons Learned from Diverse Communities," Social Inclusion 4, no. 4 (2016).
[20] Noble, Beyond Housing First: A Holistic Response to Family Homelessness in Canada (Toronto, ON: Raising the Roof, 2015).
[21] A. Segaert, The National Shelter Study: Emergency Shelter Use in Canada 2005-2009 (Ottawa, ON: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2012).

- Youth are vulnerable to developing high-risk behaviours/coping strategies (e.g., drug use; survival sex), which can lead to chronic and episodic homelessness.[22]
- Youth in care are at risk of homelessness when they move locations, or stop receiving services as they age.[23]

Female homelessness

- According to shelter data, approximately one-third of shelter users are women (31.4%). Women are slightly overrepresented among the chronic homeless population at 35.8%.[24]
- One pathway into homelessness for women is violence within the household with one in four homeless women reporting having experienced domestic violence, and most families using emergency shelters headed by single women.[25]
- Rates of shelter use are higher for Indigenous women than for non-Indigenous women (32.4% of Indigenous shelter users are women compared to 23.5% for non-Indigenous).[26]
- Indigenous women experience the highest levels of gender-based violence in Canada, which may correspond to a higher need for shelter use.[27]
- Key informants for the evaluation noted women with children tend not to experience absolute homelessness and will seek some other, if only temporary, means of housing rather than shelters out of concern for their children and possibly concerns regarding the involvement of child welfare agencies and maintaining child custody.

Seniors' homelessness

- Seniors and older adults list financial factors, such as being unable to pay rent and loss of employment as leading to episodes of homelessness.[28]
- Rates of homelessness are increasing for those over 50; however, there are relatively few shelter users over 65.
- Key informants for the evaluation noted that lack of supports available to seniors who are vulnerable to becoming homeless is a serious problem in many communities.

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[22] É. Roy et al., "Mortality in a Cohort of Street Youth in Montreal," Jama 292, no. 5 (2004): 569 to 574.
[23] J. Evenson, and C. Barr. Youth Homelessness in Canada: The Road to Solutions (Toronto, ON: Raising the Roof, 2009).
[24] A. Segaert, The National Shelter Study: Emergency Shelter Use in Canada 2005-2009 (Ottawa, ON: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2012).
[25] J.W. Schiff, R. Schiff, and A.Turner, "Rural Homelessness in Western Canada: Lessons Learned from Diverse Communities," Social Inclusion 4, no. 4 (2016).
[26] A. Segaert, The National Shelter Study: Emergency Shelter Use in Canada 2005-2009 (Ottawa, ON: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2012).
[27] S. Perreault, Criminal Victimization in Canada, 2014 (Report No. 85-002-X). (Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada, 2015).
[28] J.W. Schiff, and A. Turner, Housing First in Rural Canada: Rural Homelessness and Housing First Feasibility Across 22 Canadian Communities (Calgary, Alberta: Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary, 2014).

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two-Spirit homelessness

- LGBTQ2S groups have specialized needs, such as support for housing, along with support for substance abuse, mental health, and identity development from a trauma-informed care approach.[29]
- LGBTQ2S youth who experience homelessness are overrepresented in the population of youth who experience homelessness (20 to 40% identify as LGBTQ2S).[30]
- Point-in-Time count data suggests that approximately 10% of homeless adults identify as LGBTQ.[31]

2.3 Contributing factors and areas of need

The program's design considers many of the contributing factors to homelessness and areas of specific needs including supporting approaches to addressing systemic and societal barriers, provision of emergency housing supports, and accessing health and social services within communities.

Addressing systemic and societal barriers

Systemic and societal barriers, as direct contributors to homelessness, are indicated throughout the literature on homelessness in Canada, and further noted by key informants for the evaluation. Overall, addressing these complex, multi-faceted factors requires multiple partners bringing different resources to the table. The literature reviewed suggests that addressing barriers can be supported through increasing involvement of all stakeholders, fostering cross-sectorial homelessness prevention efforts, and supporting efforts to address broader structural factors that contribute to homelessness.

By focusing and directly supporting communities, community planning, partnerships and collaboration, the program design is supportive of the pluralistic, coordinated approach to addressing systemic and societal barriers for various populations within multi-jurisdictional settings.

Addressing health, social service and income needs

Ongoing needs to access health and social services were also identified in the literature and by key informants as contributing to homelessness. This includes a range of health and social services, such as services related to mental health and/or addictions, employment, income support, and education or training.

The Housing First approach addresses some of these needs by providing funds for intensive case management services that connect clients to existing

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[29] J. Ecker, LGBTQ2S Adult Housing Needs Assessment (Ottawa, ON: Daybreak Non Profit Housing, 2017).

[30] J. Ecker, "Queer, Young, and Homeless: A Review of the Literature," Child & Youth Services 37, no. 4 (2016): 325 to 361; I.A. Abramovich, "No Safe Place to Go-LGBTQ Youth Homelessness in Canada: Reviewing the Literature," Canadian Journal of Family and Youth/Le Journal Canadien de Famille et de la Jeunesse 4, no. 1(2012): 29 to 51.

[31] T. Aubry et al., "Identifying the Patterns of Emergency Shelter Stays of Single Individuals in Canadian Cities of Different Sizes," Housing Studies 28, no. 6 (2013): 910 to 927.

community services. The program design also includes support for a coordinator or peer-support worker under the Assertive Community Treatment model, and facilitates access to income supports, pre-employment supports and bridging to the labour market, life skills development, and supports to improve clients' social integration.

Addressing community support needs

Drop-in centres, shelters and soup kitchens were identified in the literature, interviews and case studies as being ongoing needs in many communities. A few key informants observed that while access to housing and other social services is important, access to various community supports is also key in preventing and reducing homelessness. It is often through these community supports that housing outreach workers are able to make contact and develop relationships with homeless and vulnerable clients to assist them in obtaining housing.

Some activities associated with community supports can be funded under the non-Housing First portion of the funds available through the Designated Communities and Aboriginal Homelessness streams. However, there were some concerns expressed by key informant groups including Community Entity/Community Advisory Board, Service Canada representatives, and experts, that some of the funding that would have been previously available for these types of community supports is no longer available, given the requirements for an increased proportion of funding being allocated to activities under the Housing First approach, which currently focuses on chronic and episodic homelessness.

Addressing housing support needs

There is a continued strong need for housing supports according to evidence from the case studies,[32] literature reviews and interviews. Many homeless individuals require financial and other supports to assist them initially with accessing stable housing, and later, with ongoing supports to help them maintain their housing and access other needed services. The program's design supports activities such as: facilitating access to housing; providing time-limited bridging through the Emergency Housing Funding; apartment set-up; repairing damages by clients; intensive case management; and landlord-tenant services.

[32] Four case study communities (Edmonton, Fredericton, Hamilton, and Victoria) were selected to reflect diverse regional funding streams and target populations. The case studies for each community included fidelity assessments reporting on the degree of adherence to the Housing First model and its related principles; key informant interviews with community stakeholders (n=40), and a review of robust administrative documentation (Community Plans and Annual Updates, Homelessness Electronic Reporting Information Network data).

Addressing affordable housing needs

Lack of affordable housing is identified as a main contributing factor to not only why people initially lose their housing, but also why they remain homeless. While the responsibilities for affordable housing are beyond the program scope and ESDC mandate, the program does provide some bridging through an emergency housing funding component to assist in maintaining housing in the short-term.

> For example, a case study in Fredericton indicated that over 1,000 households were considered to be in extreme core housing need situations in 2015. The earned income for the households was $20,000 or less, and they were spending more than 50% of their income on housing.

> Focusing on the city of Hamilton, a case study found that with 14,600 social housing units in 2016, there remained a waiting list of nearly 6,000 households.

According to key informant interviews and case studies, the situations with limited affordable housing availability creates considerable challenges in addressing the fundamental Housing First approach principles of "offering clients choices in housing" and "integrating housing into the community".

2.4 Program focus

Within the Housing First component of the program, the focus is on addressing the needs of those who are chronically and episodically homeless. It defines the chronically homeless population as those who are currently homeless and have been homeless for six months or more in the past year (i.e. have spent more than 180 cumulative nights in a shelter or place not fit for human habitation). Episodic homelessness is defined as individuals who are currently homeless and have experienced three or more episodes of homelessness in the previous year.

By focusing on chronic and episodic homelessness through the Housing First approach, the program is prioritizing funding specifically for this segment of the homeless population who tend to use more bed nights in emergency shelters.[33] The proportion of funding allocated to this population and Housing First ranges according to community size and funding stream.

In addition, through non-Housing First investments, the program design continues to support the needs of all homeless populations, directly such as veterans, Indigenous, rural and remote, youth, women, seniors, and LGBTQ2S

[33] A. Segaert, The Extent and Nature of Veteran Homelessness in Canada (Ottawa, ON: Employment and Social Development Canada, 2015).

homeless populations. Support occurs through funding allocation to other initiatives funded under the Designated Communities funding stream, Aboriginal Funding Stream, or depending on their location, under Rural and Remote Funding Stream. These populations may also be directly supported through Housing First programming if they fall within the definition of chronic and episodic homelessness.

2.5 Alignment with Government priorities

The Homelessness Partnering Strategy is aligned with federal government priorities and is well integrated with the priorities of Employment and Social Development Canada. Moreover, the program is playing a leadership role in addressing homelessness across Canada.

Alignment of objectives with federal government priorities
The Homelessness Partnering Strategy supports ESDC's core responsibility for social development, which is to increase inclusion and opportunities for participation of Canadians in their communities.

The 2015 Mandate Letter of the Minister of Families, Children, and Social Development commits to re-establishing the federal government's role in supporting affordable housing, including by providing communities with the support they need for Housing First initiatives that help homeless Canadians find stable housing.

Through Budget 2016, the program received an additional $111.8 M over two years beginning in 2016 to 2017, an increase of approximately 50%. This represents the first increase in federal homelessness funding since the inception of the program more than 15 years ago. Budget 2017 announced $2.1 billion over the next 11 years to expand and extend funding for the program. By 2021 to 2022, this will nearly double the investments made in 2015 to 2016.

Alignment of objectives with ESDC priorities
Through providing stable housing to individuals who are homeless, or those at risk of homelessness, the program contributes to ESDC's vision to build a stronger and more competitive Canada, to support Canadians in making choices that help them live productive and rewarding lives, and to improve Canadians' quality of life.

The program supports ESDC's core responsibility for social development by facilitating greater social and economic integration of individuals who are homeless, or those at imminent risk of homelessness. This is achieved through the mobilization of partners and enhancement of community networks to address barriers to well-being faced by individuals who are homeless.

The program also aligns with the Departmental strategic priority, as listed in the 2016 to 2020 Strategic Framework, to develop social policy initiatives that address the needs of families and of vulnerable groups, support communities in the development of social infrastructure, and advance the solutions to social issues through innovative approaches.

Leadership role of the program to address homelessness
By focusing and directly supporting communities, community planning, partnerships, collaboration with all levels of government, non-governmental organization and private sectors, the program is undertaking a leadership role to address homelessness across Canada. Key aspects that contribute to this leadership role are the national scope of the program across all provinces and territories, and the implementation of a common overall approach to address homelessness in Canadian communities via the Housing First approach. This design contributes to equity for Canadians struggling with homelessness, while also maintaining emphasis on the importance of flexibility and local solutions through the requirements for Community Advisory Boards to plan local initiatives which are then delivered through community entities.

3. Program implementation

3.1 Communication and coordination

Overall, the communication and coordination within ESDC and between the federal government and the funded communities was found to be functioning well.

Communication and coordination
Key informants indicated that, in general, communications and coordination between the various players was effective. Most groups and units involved indicated that overall there was frequent communication with easily accessible information, as required. Information flow between various levels was at times impeded given the tiered communication resulting from the complexities and number of groups involved. This slowdown was noted in interviews with some Service Delivery Officers when they were trying to obtain information from national headquarters.

To counter this challenge, two design mechanisms were highlighted as facilitating the information flow: the Business Expertise group were viewed as an accessible source of good information and provided an important link to headquarters; and, the Service Delivery Officer network was highlighted as providing a quality forum within which to share information and learning.

Communications and coordination between ESDC and funded communities was also found to be functioning well. Most key informants from both Service Canada and the Community Entities and Community Advisory Boards reported effective

and frequent communications that took place within positive relationships in which the communities felt supported.

3.2 Monitoring and reporting

The program's requirements for monitoring and reporting are perceived as burdensome at the community level. There are a large number of monitoring and reporting requirements that are not currently coordinated with other funding sources at the provincial and territorial level, resulting in a significant workload for communities.

The program design uses multiple mechanisms and tools for monitoring and reporting including Community Plans, Community Plan Annual Updates, and the Homelessness Electronic Reporting and Information Network[34]. Key informants at the community level reported monitoring through requested quarterly reports, activity reports, progress reports, mid-year dialogues, audits and financial reporting. Overall, the level of monitoring and reporting is high and can be quite burdensome according to many key informants from both the community and ESDC.

Key informants noted that monitoring and reporting is important to demonstrate progress and good use of funds. However, they also noted that significantly more reporting is required when compared to other provincial/territorial programs even though the program funding amount is often less. The reporting burden at the community level is increased in part due a lack of coordination and integration of reporting requirements across the various funding sources (primarily federal and provincial/territorial).

One difficulty in aligning with provincial and territorial reporting is that they each have varying requirements and timing. Contributing to the monitoring and reporting burden for some communities are the limited capacity, the community size, and changes in reporting systems. The program's administrative allowance for funds aims to support capacity in reporting. However it may not be enough as a few Service Canada and community representatives reported there was limited training on some of the data systems and tools.

A few Service Canada and community representatives reported confusion and misinterpretations on how to enter information to ensure consistency and eliminate double-counting. This group, comprised of Community Entity/Community Advisory Board representatives and Service Canada representatives, also reported challenges with service delivery officers not having enough training or knowledge of the data systems to provide proper support to communities. A review of support offered by national headquarters indicates that

[34] The Community Entity is responsible for reporting aggregated project-level details on activities to the Program. Since 2011, all project reports have been uploaded to the Homeless Electronic Reporting Information Network database through a Web-based application.

Service Canada and Community Entity representatives were provided with various forms of training including ongoing Web-Ex sessions, in-class training and daily support along with materials and guidelines for results reporting. Despite these resources, a gap in training and knowledge was nevertheless reported by some service delivery officers.

3.3 Implementing Housing First approach

There has been significant progress in the implementation of the Housing First approach in the communities. Contributing factors to the implementation included community planning and collaboration, readiness projects and transition timing, and prior Housing First exposure and acceptance. Challenges included the perceived rapid roll-out, ambitious targets, and continued lack of affordable housing in many communities.

Readiness and transition to the Housing First approach

The adoption of the Housing First approach represented a major shift in the direction of the program. To give communities time to implement Housing First, fiscal year 2014 to 2015 was considered a transition year to allow communities to complete projects from the previous funding cycle and to prepare for a Housing First approach. Beginning in fiscal year 2015 to 2016, the eight largest Designated Communities were required to invest a minimum of 65% of their funding in Housing First projects. Mid-sized Designated Communities and Aboriginal communities with annual allocations greater than $200,000 were required to allocate a minimum of 40% of their funding towards Housing First starting in fiscal year 2016 to 2017. Communities that receive less than $200,000 per year in Strategy funding were not required to meet a Housing First target.

A case study in the city of Edmonton revealed that it first implemented a Housing First approach through a wrap-around service pilot project in 2007. Learnings and best practices were integrated into the community's 10-year plan in 2009. Following this, Edmonton rated its readiness for adopting a Housing First approach with the highest scores on nearly all dimensions.

Given that the Housing First approach was new for some communities, there was a flexible allocation of funding within the Designated Communities stream that could be used for readiness activities. Among communities planning to undertake Housing First, 74% planned to engage in readiness activities in 2014 to 2015 and this number fell to 59% in 2015 to 2016 according to the community plans and annual updates. While those communities that had already been using a Housing First approach could continue directly into using the program funding to support their activities, various readiness projects were identified and funded in those communities less familiar with the approach.

A brief review of selected Community Plans and Community Plan Annual Updates indicated that readiness activities included training various representatives from community organizations on the approach, developing and training on data collection systems, and conducting research to determine the actual counts of those in the community who would meet the program's criteria of being chronically or episodically homeless. To facilitate and accelerate the shift of communities to a Housing First approach, the program also funded the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness to build upon previous work developed by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, to deliver tailored Housing First training, technical assistance using a train-the-trainer model and to develop open source tool kits and training materials directly accessible online. Information from key informant interviews and case studies involving Community Entity/Community Advisory Board representatives and Service Canada representatives indicated that the readiness funding combined with the preparation time contributed to a smoother transition for communities. Highlighted effective activities included the training and tools received through the project delivered by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness.

> The city of Hamilton, having considerable experience with Housing First, utilized the readiness funding to improve readiness for the services and supports for their Indigenous population, as indicated by case study data.

In contrast, some implementation issues that were noted by key informants included challenges with communication between ESDC and the communities after initial announcements and information sessions. The communication challenges were attributed by some key informants, particularly those representing Service Canada, Community Entities/Community Advisory Boards, and experts, to the rapid roll-out of the Housing First approach. This appeared to affect communities less if they were already aware of and implementing a Housing First approach, and where there were existing high levels of collaboration among community organizations.

Implementation of the Housing First approach

Overall, community representative key informants were supportive of the Housing First approach. It was noted in key informant interviews and case studies that communities had accepted Housing First principles, and were generally following them to the best of their ability with the caveat that for some communities there was ongoing work to be done in terms of adherence to Housing First principles. Factors that were highlighted as contributing to this acceptance were the high levels of effort expended in communication and coordination to engage all relevant community stakeholders.

Such efforts were found to contribute to increased community acceptance and interest in Housing First, which led to greater collaboration, and facilitated implementation. Key informants credited the program's design of encouraging

efforts to communicate and work collaboratively at the community level (e.g., Community Planning, working with Community Advisory Boards, funding Community Entities) with the smoother facilitation and adoption of the Housing First approach.

Information from the Community Plans and Community Plan Updates included self-rating of each community's adherence to fourteen core Housing First principles. Among the 28 communities that rated themselves in 2014 and again in 2016, the average fidelity scores improved considerably from approximately 2.55 to 3.47 on a four point scale.[35] Among the Big 8 communities[36] which had implementation targets within this period, the average fidelity score rose from 2.84 to 3.64 indicating improvement in the adoption of the core principles. The two Housing First principle areas achieving highest fidelity were "service choice" and "integrated housing". Areas of lower fidelity occurred with "reasonable cost for housing" which had the lowest ranking across all communities in both 2014 to 2015 and 2015 to 2016, and is in keeping with the main challenges and needs previously identified.

Despite not being required to invest in Housing First projects during the first year of implementation, 60% of communities reported investing in Housing First projects in 2014 to 2015, which then rose to 71% by 2015 to 2016. All of the Big 8 communities invested in Housing First Projects in the first year.

The Big 8 communities' target related to having 65% of program funding allocated to Housing First projects by the second year of implementation (2015 to 2016) was challenging. Only four of the Big 8 communities were able to meet this target. Despite four communities missing the target, overall within this group there was progress with the average allocation to Housing First projects increasing from 44% in 2014 to 2015 to 66% in 2015 to 2016. Findings from key informant interviews with ESDC policy and service delivery representatives indicated that the target was viewed by a few communities as prescriptive, and that it was an ambitious target within a relatively short time frame, particularly for those communities who had not previously implemented a Housing First approach on a community-wide level. Communities with no Housing First experience reported facing challenges in adapting their community programming to fit the criteria, and found the learning curve and required levels of organizational changes and coordination of services challenging.

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[35] Fidelity scores were based on ratings of fourteen items on a four-point scale, where four demonstrates a high level of fidelity with the Housing First approach. The overall fidelity score was calculated by totaling scores across all fourteen categories and calculating a mean score.

[36] The Big 8 communities are: Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa, and Halifax.

4. System integration, alignment and sustainability

The program design supports objectives related to system integration, alignment and sustainability through the development of community plans, support of Community Advisory Boards with diverse representation, and funding through a Community Entity to implement various activities and projects. According to the program directives (2014 to 2019), specific activities to assist in coordinating resources can include: identifying, integrating and improving services on an ongoing basis; working with the relevant sectors to identify barriers to permanent housing and opportunities to address the barriers; and maximizing all investments by coordinating funded activities to avoid duplication and gaps, ensuring that funding is used strategically to maximize results. The Community Advisory Boards are expected to play an important role in coordination and development of partnerships for these purposes.

4.1 Stakeholder participation

Overall, the Community Advisory Boards are relatively diverse with good participation from the non-profit, health, and housing sectors within communities. Government representation from federal, provincial and territorial levels was cited as sometimes challenging with at times over-representation or under-representation. There appears to be under-representation from some important community sectors including the private sector, police and corrections, and landlord associations. Another noted area of challenge is including participation from people with lived experience of homelessness.

Stakeholder participation and partner engagement is an essential design element of the program. According to the program's logic model, it is expected that through its community-based approach, the program will increase partners' involvement, align efforts and priorities, and maximize the contributions of all stakeholders in a collective effort to prevent and reduce homelessness. Partners include key stakeholders within communities; municipalities; Indigenous organizations; not-for-profit; private sector; provincial and territorial governments; federal government departments; crown corporations; and research bodies.

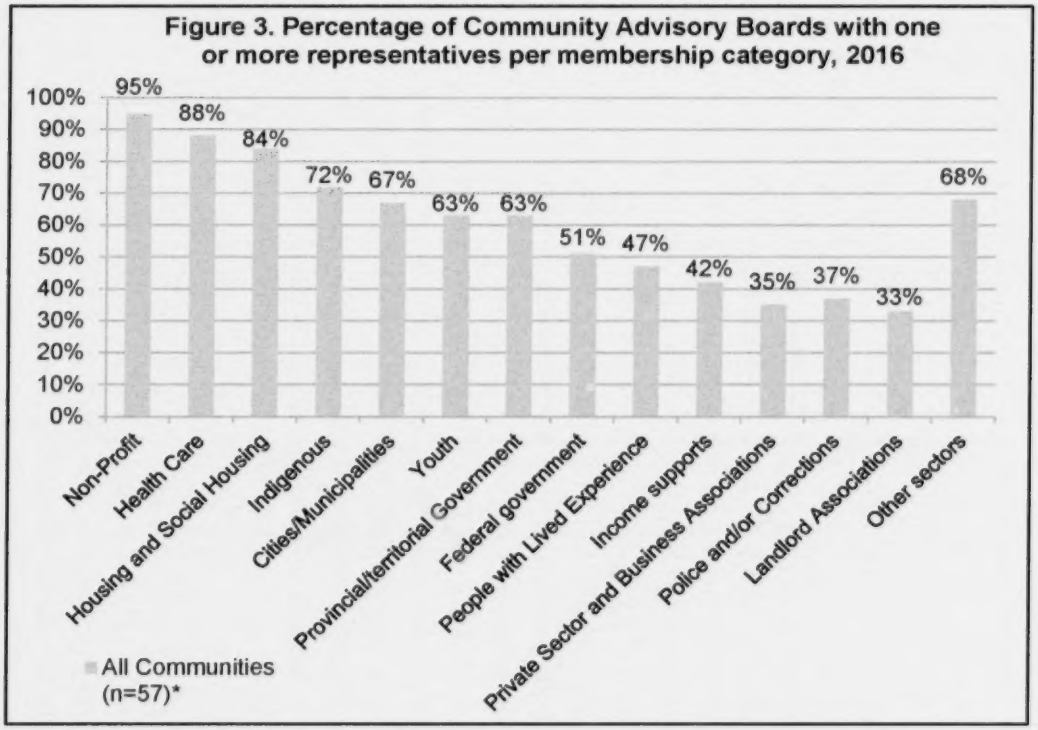
A fundamental component of the program's design is to have Community Advisory Boards develop a community plan. As such, Boards engage and integrate the different sectors that house and provide services to those experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The Board is expected to play a strategic and coordination role to maximize all homelessness efforts within a community. Given these responsibilities, the composition of these Boards is an important consideration in maximizing its efforts and in contributing to stakeholder participation in the community. Having Boards that are more comprehensive also contributes to a systematic approach to addressing homelessness.

As noted in Table 2, the Community Advisory Boards have strong representation from a variety of community stakeholder groups, but primarily from the non-profit and health care sectors, as well as housing and Indigenous representation. Representation from the provincial/territorial governments and federal government is more likely to occur on the larger communities' Boards. Groups that are less frequently found on Community Advisory Boards include people with lived experience, private sector and business associations, police or corrections and landlord associations. The under-representation from these groups was also noted by some key informants. On average, the Boards have included representation from at least seven different groups since 2014.

Table 2: Percentage of Community Advisory Boards with one or more representative per membership category, by community funding size, 2016

Membership categories	All communities (n=57)*	Big 8 (n=8)	Over $200,000 (n=28)	Under $200,000 (n=15)	Aboriginal Over $200,000 (n=6)
Non-profit	95%	88%	96%	93%	100%
Health care, including mental health and addictions treatment	88%	75%	89%	87%	100%
Housing and social housing	84%	63%	82%	93%	100%
Indigenous	72%	75%	61%	80%	100%
Cities/municipalities	67%	63%	75%	67%	33%
Youth	63%	50%	61%	60%	100%
Provincial/territorial government	63%	88%	68%	60%	17%
Federal government	51%	63%	61%	40%	17%
People with lived experience	47%	50%	46%	53%	33%
Income supports	42%	25%	50%	40%	33%
Private sector and business associations	35%	38%	36%	27%	50%
Police and/or corrections	37%	38%	39%	27%	50%
Landlord associations	33%	25%	43%	20%	33%
Other sectors	68%	63%	68%	67%	83%

Source: Community Plan Annual Update 2016 to 2017
*Information not available for Iqaluit and Thunder Bay



4.2 Investments and funding allocations

The program is designed to provide leadership in addressing homelessness issues across Canada while encouraging local planning, delivery and solutions. Within this role, the program contributes financially to communities' initiatives, but most communities could identify and have accessed other resources that were substantially higher than what was provided through the program. On average, approximately $13 is being invested in addressing community homelessness issues for every $1 being invested through the program. This would suggest a move to a more systematic approach to addressing homelessness.

Investments to address homelessness

While the program is designed to provide leadership in addressing homelessness across Canada, there is an expectation that there will also be significant investments from various partners to achieve the anticipated outcomes. In this way, a structural or systematic approach to homelessness is supported. The program design requirement is that, at a minimum, each dollar from the Designated Community funding be matched by one dollar from within the community.

In 2015 to 2016, only three of the Designated Communities were unable to fully cost-match at the required 1:1 ratio. The average community dollars per program dollar across all communities fluctuated slightly from $14.31 in 2014 to 2015 to $12.90 in 2015 to 2016. Among the Big 8 communities, the average community dollars per program dollar was $13.02 in 2015 to 2016, with considerable range from $2.16 in one community to $29.74 in another. The municipal and provincial governments provided the majority of non-program funds to support homelessness efforts. While there is variation in the level of community dollars contributed to the program, overall the program is exceeding the required 1:1 ratio.

Allocation of program funding

The allocation of funding for the Designated Communities funding stream was originally developed in 1999 at which time the Big 10 communities, which included the Big 8 plus Montreal and Quebec City, were identified as having the most significant homelessness issues to address and as a result were allocated 80% of the funding under this stream at that time. The formula for allocation among the communities consisted of three equally weighted variables of 1999 population estimates, number of people living under the Low-Income Cut-Off after taxes, and the average two-year rental vacancy rate adjusted so that a higher number reflects a worse rental market situation. The proportional allocation to these communities has not been updated to reflect changes in any of these variables (however funding has increased overall by 25% for 2016 to 2017 and 2017 to 2018).

The funding allocation for the mid-sized communities received the remaining 20% of the overall stream allocation. Funding was further allocated to communities based on population estimates. Selection of the mid-sized communities was done in consultation with the provinces and territories. The proportional allocations to these communities have not been updated (however funding has increased overall by 50% for 2016 to 2017 and 2017 to 2018).

The funding allocation for the Rural and Remote Homelessness stream has had a few changes in the past few years. Incremental funding has been used to close the per capita gap across jurisdictions. Another change with Budget 2016 was that the prioritization of projects in communities with populations of 25,000 or less was removed. The amount under this stream has doubled under Budget 2016 starting in 2016 to 2017 and 2017 to 2018.

The funding allocation for the Aboriginal Homelessness stream was originally set in 1999 with funding going to eight communities to match the investments under the Urban Aboriginal Strategy at that time. The remaining funding was distributed to an additional 29 communities and regions demonstrating needs. The amount under this stream has doubled under Budget 2016 starting in 2016 to 2017 and 2017 to 2018.

Overall, key informants from most stakeholder groups noted concerns with the perceived inequitable and potentially dated approach the program uses to allocate funding within some of the funding streams. Key informants from ESDC policy and service delivery representatives noted that the same communities have been considered "Designated Communities" since 1999 with no new additions or changes. According to some key informants, there is a perception that updates are needed in how the program determines which communities are "designated", and the allocation of funding according to community. Some key informants reported there is a need to revisit the methods of allocating program funds among communities as they have undergone substantial demographic shifts and changes during this period.

With respect to the potential development of a new allocation formula, a few key informants had some suggestions to consider various factors when allocating program funding to communities (some of which were used in the original formulas), such as the level and nature of homelessness, housing availability and costs, the community's use of social programs, the availability and capacity of non-governmental organizations for delivering services, and other unique community characteristics. For example, some communities are far less able to access other community resources and as a result, there is a large variation in total leveraged funding available between communities when taking into account all funding sources.

In addition to the Designated Communities, there were concerns expressed as to how some small, rural or Indigenous communities have few or no funds to assist them in addressing homelessness. Allocation of the Aboriginal Homelessness funding was also considered by a few key informants as challenging as a few communities with significant Indigenous populations received no or limited funding from the stream, while communities with smaller Indigenous populations were seemingly receiving more of this funding. This perceived incongruence may in part be attributable to the unchanged allocation patterns established in 1999, and the absence of use of a funding formula based on Indigenous populations, as previously discussed.

4.3 Alignment with priorities

Overall, there is good alignment of the program's priorities with those of the provinces/territories and the communities, and particularly the emphasis on the Housing First approach. However, the prevention of homelessness and addressing the needs of various vulnerable populations is also considered a high priority by communities.

It is expected that through the development of community plans, Designated Communities and selected Aboriginal communities will identify priorities for funding. Priorities will support comprehensive community-level approaches to

homelessness that adopt a Housing First approach; improve the situation of homeless individuals and families and those at imminent risk of homelessness through individualized services; preserve or increase the capacity of facilities used to address the needs of people who are homeless; and improve community coordination and data management.

Overall, the evaluation found that there was alignment between the program's priorities, and those of the provinces and territories. The review of provincial and territorial documents demonstrated consistency between the Housing First approach being emphasized in the program's design, and the priorities of provincial and territorial governments. Provinces and territories are also prioritizing and adopting the Housing First approach. As a result, they are continuing to engage in the coordination and funding of services, and developing partnerships within communities. For example, provincial and territorial governments are providing rent supplements to create new supportive housing units to communities; conducting research on how to best apply the Housing First model to specialized communities (e.g., smaller northern, rural, and remote communities); and supporting the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of existing Housing First programming. A few key informants from both the provincial/territorial governments and community organizations indicated some gaps or lack of alignment such as ensuring that all parties were using the same definition of Housing First.

The alignment between program and community priorities was confirmed by some of the key informants from Community Advisory Boards and Community Entities. Where alignment was identified, it was with respect to the emphasis placed on the Housing First approach. It was noted in the interviews and case studies that for those communities that had already implemented a Housing First approach, there is good priority alignment between the program and those communities given the common approach. Similarly, for those communities in which the program has been a driving force behind a successful transition to Housing First, there is generally good alignment of priorities.

Information from key informant interviews and case studies indicates that there are several communities that produce their own community plan in addition to the plan developed for the program. As such, they tend to use their own community plans as their guiding documents for addressing homelessness in their local contexts. In the case studies, all communities had developed their own community plans in addition to the program-focused plan, and indicated that the program priorities matched those with respect to Housing First, but also indicated that they had additional priority areas in terms of homelessness prevention and addressing the needs of other vulnerable populations that were not included in the focus of their program plan.

4.4 Coordination of programs and services

Coordination of programs and services has been enhanced in part by the diversity of the membership of the Community Advisory Boards and stakeholder participation, various readiness projects, and coordination mechanisms such as intensive case management teams. Challenges were identified in those communities that lacked alignment of priorities across various stakeholders, and lack of resources and capacity.

The evidence from key informant interviews and case studies shows that stakeholders are taking a variety of steps to increase coordination and integration across partners and jurisdictions, including community organizations, provincial and territorial services and departments, and municipalities. Some of this coordination is occurring at the individual client level as in the case of intensive case management working with community nurses, health clinics and hospital discharge programs. The program is directly contributing to this level of coordination through the funding and support of intensive case management for clients under the Housing First approach. In other cases, the coordination is occurring at the program level. For example, the coordination of rent assistance programs from the province or territory with emergency housing funds supplied in whole or part through program funding. As well, the evaluation found numerous examples of coordination and integration at the organizational level focusing on multiple programs and services such as collaborations between youth housing organizations, employment centres and outreach organizations. The program contributes to this type of coordination and integration through the provision of funding to facilitate access to income supports, pre-employment supports and bridging to the labour market, life skills development and support to improve clients' social integration.

Among the case studies which included Edmonton, Fredericton, Hamilton, and Victoria, those communities that were more advanced in their implementation of a Housing First approach (i.e., Hamilton and Edmonton) generally reported high levels of coordination and integration of programs and services. Examples of coordination mechanisms included "complex cases" committees, working groups and sub-committees with mandated coordination areas, and coordinated data systems. Among key informants and case studies, there was an indication that the implementation of the Housing First approach had contributed to greater coordination and integration of programs and services.

Overall, several facilitators of coordination and integration of programs and services were identified, such as efforts to engage and include various stakeholders in initiatives, generation of formal agreements, and the development of coordinated intake systems and data collection/maintenance systems. In contrast, barriers included lack of alignment of priorities at different levels (e.g., across provinces and territories and/or community agencies), lack of

resources/capacity, and stakeholders who were resistant to coordination/integration, among other factors.

Key ways in which the program could further support coordination and integration efforts were indicated through interviews and case studies, and focused primarily on improved coordination with the provinces and territories. Suggestions included more work with provincial and territorial governments to increase the availability of housing, and to work with provincial and territorial counterparts to coordinate programming, definitions, and data systems. This is consistent with the literature that indicates that a lack of coordination between federal and provincial partners was a substantial barrier to system integration and service delivery.[37, 38]

4.5 Understanding homelessness

The information and data being collected and produced are useful to demonstrate national level trends in the areas specific to federal investments. However, usefulness for other stakeholders including communities in meeting their needs for information to better understand the causes of and how to address homelessness is more limited.

It is expected that through data collection, results reporting and analysis, communities, partners and stakeholders, as well as all orders of government, will have access to the information required to: increase understanding of the causes of homelessness; increase capacity to correlate factors impacting housing stability; and have a better understanding of the services required and available to address homelessness. This includes the communities' ability to identify individuals to be targeted for Housing First interventions. This may also contribute to the development of innovative approaches and the implementation of best practices to address the unique needs of individuals who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness.

The National Homelessness Information System collects data from shelters across Canada and in 2018 to 2019 the target was for 270 shelters to provide information into the System. This target was surpassed for each of the years examined within the scope of the evaluation with attainment ranging from 329 shelters in 2013 to 343 shelters in 2014.

Key informants were generally positive about the potential of the data collected through this system to provide information on the current trends in homelessness for participating communities, as well as nationally. Figure 4 represents the percentage of total data provided by emergency shelters, transitional housing

[37] Noble, Beyond Housing First: A Holistic Response to Family Homelessness in Canada (Toronto, ON: Raising the Roof, 2015).
[38] J.W. Schiff, and A. Turner, Housing First in Rural Canada: Rural Homelessness and Housing First Feasibility Across 22 Canadian Communities (Calgary, Alberta: Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary, 2014).

and violence against women shelters feeding into the National Homelessness Information System in 2014 to 2015. Figure 4 shows that 63% of the data was provided by Emergency Shelters. Figure 5 represents the percentage of total shelter beds provided by emergency shelters, transitional housing and violence against women shelters in 2014 to 2015. Figure 5 shows that 58% of the shelter beds data were provided by emergency shelters that year.

Figure 4. Proportion of types of shelters providing information to the National Homelessness Information System in 2014 to 2015

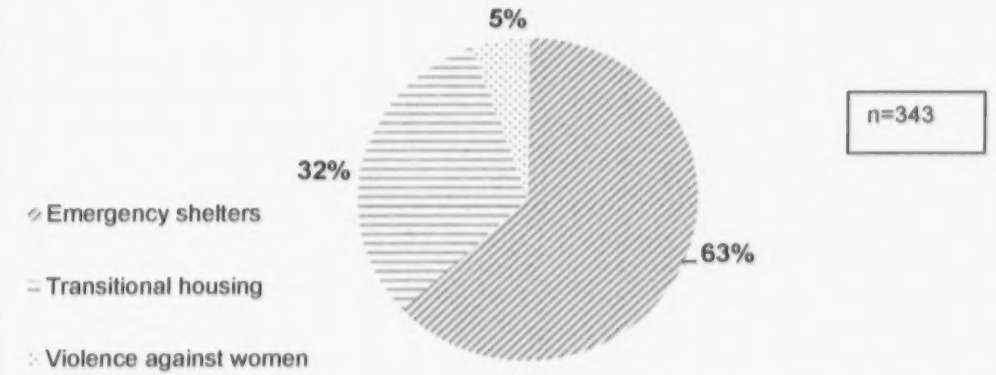
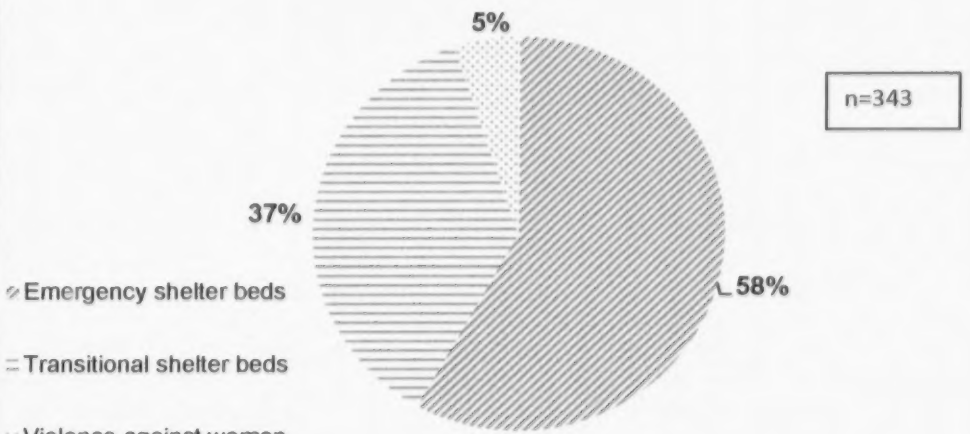


Figure 5. Proportion of shelter beds provided by type of shelter in 2014 to 2015



A few key informants reported that the information collected through the Homelessness Electronic Reporting and Information Network was more valuable for providing information from a national or regional perspective, rather than a community-level perspective. In particular, some ESDC representatives reported that the information from this system was useful for the program to demonstrate trends in areas where federal government investments had been made and for program and design and policy purposes.

Overall, key informant and case study participants had mixed views on the extent to which the program provides stakeholders with access to needed information to better understand the causes of and how to address homelessness. While a few sources were cited as useful (e.g., Point-in-Time Counts, information derived from the National Homelessness Information System), some community representatives indicated that their own data systems and efforts provided them with the information that they needed.

5. Contributions to increasing stability and preventing/reducing homelessness

5.1 Housing First placements and housing stability

The program has surpassed the target of housing placements for Housing First clients within the first two years of implementation. To date there has been some early success with Housing First clients remaining in stable housing until the 12-month mark.

According to the program's performance measurement strategy there was a goal to place 3,000 people in longer-term stable housing by 2015 to 2016. From the data available[39] in the Homelessness Electronic Reporting and Information Network, in that year there were 6,621 individuals placed in stable housing under the Designated Communities Stream, with another 272 placed in stable housing under the Aboriginal Homelessness Stream and 39 placed under the Rural and Remote Stream.

In the city of Victoria, a case study identified several areas as having contributed to increased housing stability. They included: a tenant support worker who assists in resolving immediate crises, a pilot project to collectively house 20 Indigenous individuals who were previously not considered for housing, and a Streets-to-Homes program that successfully utilized a landlord liaison approach in resolving client-landlord issues and keeping people housed.

[39] The data were extracted from the reporting system in May 2017.

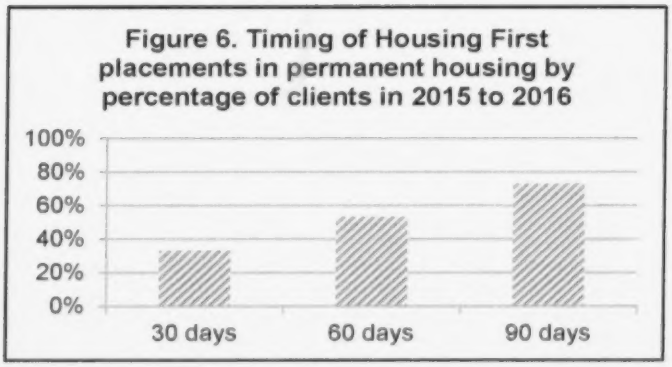


Figure 6 represents the percentage of Housing First clients placed in permanent housing 30 days (33%), 60 days (53%), and 90 days (73%) after enrolling in the program.

In addition to housing placement, the program aims to support individuals to achieve housing stability and measures the extent to which this is realized at various stages. Early results on stable housing and successful exits for 2014 to 2015 and 2015 to 2016 are provided in Table 3. Among clients who were still in the program at the six-month mark, approximately 60% were in stable housing in 2014 to 2015, and 77% in 2015 to 2016. A small proportion at the six-month mark had successfully exited the program where individuals have demonstrated the ability to maintain stable housing and the individual requires less intensive supports and services. Clients who had successfully left the program by the six-month mark included 19% in 2014 to 2015 and 7% in 2015 to 2016.[40]

Table 3: Housing stability and successful program exits, 2014 to 2015 and 2015 to 2016

Membership categories	2014 to 2015	2015 to 2016
six-month stable housing	60%	77%
six-month exit from program	19%	7%
12-month stable housing	N/A	41%
12-month exit from program	N/A	43%

Source: Homelessness Electronic Reporting and Information Network

At the 12-month mark, for which only 2015 to 2016 data are available, 41% of Housing First clients were in stable housing and 43% had successfully exited the program although it was unknown the extent to which this group had been able to maintain their housing while out of the program. The administrative data

[40] Successfully exiting from the program indicates stable housing at time of exit. However it is not possible to measure ongoing housing stability after this point. As a result, there should be some caution used in assuming that the sum of the two measures (stable housing in program + successful exit from program) is a completely accurate measure of those in stable housing overall at a given point in time (e.g., six-months, 12-months).

demonstrates surpassing the targets for housing placements, and promising indications of housing stability. As indicated, the evaluation found case study examples of success with supporting Housing First clients' housing stability.

Some key informants indicated that it is still early in the implementation of the Housing First approach, but that to-date what has been experienced is positive regarding results. Among key informants, one of the most frequently cited contributors to the success obtained to date is the intensive case management approach. Given that chronically and episodically homeless people often experience complex and multiple health issues, intensive case management was found to assist clients through one-on-one support from case workers and by linking the client to the needed wraparound services available in the community.

5.2 Financial stability and self-sufficiency

The program is demonstrating positive contributions towards increasing the financial stability and self-sufficiency for both Housing First and other clients. Among Housing First clients, there are early indications that approximately one in five clients are successfully leaving the program given their demonstrated ability to maintain stable housing with less intensive supports, increasing their levels of social participation and engagement in recreation and cultural programs, starting paid employment, volunteer work and educational program or skills training. There are also positive outcomes noted for other clients in the areas of improvement in employment status, and enrollment in job training and educational programs.

Through the community-based approach, it is expected that individuals who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness will have access to comprehensive, coherent and effective services and supports that will increase financial stability, including labour market integration and improved educational outcomes, in order to maintain housing stability.

Several early outcomes indicated improvements to clients' financial stability and self-sufficiency. In 2015 to 2016 approximately 10% of Housing First clients were reported as having begun new paid employment, 8% engaged in volunteer work, and 13% began an educational program or employment skills training. Another important positive change for Housing First clients in 2015 to 2016 was that almost one-half of clients (46%) experienced positive changes in social participation, and one-third (32%) engaged in recreation or cultural program and services. Examples from case studies illustrate some of the successes that have occurred in these areas such as one individual who had to be re-housed several times, but went on to graduate and find employment in a skilled trade. Another example is of a mother who struggled with addictions and whose children were in care, but who was able to achieve sobriety, return to school, and regain custody of her children.

In addition to tracking the results from Housing First clients, the communities receiving funding under the Designated Communities stream and/or Aboriginal Homelessness stream also report on the number of people that achieve positive outcomes. While there is not a base number of clients available in the Network system to calculate proportions as with the Housing First clients, there are actual counts. For example, across the two years, 4,541 clients supported by the program experienced an improvement in their employment status with approximately one-half of clients (49%) moving from no employment into full-time employment. During the same period, 3,401 clients started a job training program, and 2,566 clients started an educational program.

5.3 Preventing and reducing homelessness

Reduction of homelessness is occurring through both Housing First and non-Housing First interventions with the placement of individuals in stable housing.

The ultimate outcome of preventing and reducing homelessness is supported through the achievement of shared outcomes, specifically:

- Housing stability for homeless individuals and those at imminent risk of becoming homeless; and
- Financial stability and self-sufficiency for homeless individuals and those at imminent risk of becoming homeless.

As noted previously, the program's design focuses on homeless individuals, rather than those at imminent risk of becoming homeless. The indications are positive that at this early stage the program is contributing to the shared outcomes of increased housing stability, financial stability and self-sufficiency for homeless individuals. Given the logic model, achievements in these shared outcomes are likely to contribute to the overall reduction in homelessness.

Within a Housing First approach, the prevention of homelessness is considered a form of "tertiary prevention" that supports individuals and families who have previously experienced homelessness to limit its recurrence. Another form is "secondary prevention" which focuses on intervention strategies aimed at those who are at imminent risk of homelessness, as well as those who have recently become homeless, with the aim of avoiding homelessness or moving out of homelessness as quickly as possible. Under the program, addressing the needs of those who are at imminent risk would include those who received direct housing loss prevention interventions (approximately 25,000 non-Housing First clients across 2014 to 2015 and 2015 to 2016). Of those followed up at the three-month mark, approximately 95% remained housed.

In addition to the Housing First projects' early accomplishments, the program also provided housing placements to over 10,000 non-Housing First clients from a variety of demographic backgrounds across 2014 to 2015 and 2015 to 2016.

Information collected through key informant interviews indicated that overall the program and specifically the Housing First approach are likely to contribute to reducing homelessness, particularly among those who are chronically or episodically homeless. There were also indications that there was a need for increased efforts to prevent homelessness and to ensure that some of those groups that did not currently fit the criteria of chronic or episodic homelessness could receive the necessary services and supports that would prevent them from later being classified in this category. The vulnerable groups most frequently identified as requiring additional preventive services and supports included youth, seniors, Indigenous people, women attempting to leave domestic abuse situations, and individuals released from institutions (e.g., corrections, mental health facilities). A few key informants also noted that some of the supports needed for groups vulnerable to homelessness as indicated are beyond the mandate of the program, with some being the responsibility of other levels of government.

6. Efficiency and economy

6.1 Resources

Overall, for the period covered by the evaluation 2014 to 15 and 2015 to 2016, there was approximately $203M in grants and contributions spending across the various funding streams. The spending in grants and contributions was primarily under the Designated Communities Stream, which accounted for $162.7M (80%). This was followed by the Aboriginal Homelessness Stream that accounted for $28.5M (14%), and Rural and Remote at $10.7M (5%). The funding for the three national streams combined accounted for under $1.7M (.8%). According to project level data extracted from the Homelessness Electronic Reporting Information Network, the planned spending on Housing First activities in 2014 tp 2015 was 34% of total planned Strategy spending. This proportion increased to 57% in 2015 to 2016.

Table 4: Program spending for fiscal years 2014 to 2015 and 2015 to 2016

Funding streams	2014 to 2015	2015 to 2016	Total
Regional Funds			
Designated Communities	$79,170,615	$83,479,935	$162,650,550
Aboriginal Homelessness	$14,133,282	$14,331,591	$28,464,873
Rural and Remote	$5,172,717	$5,490,837	$10,663,554
National Funds			
National Homelessness Information System and Innovative Solutions to Homelessness	$57,352	$394,816	$452,168
Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative	$651,000	$552,000	$1,203,000
Total	$99,184,966	$104,249,179	$203,434,145

Source: Chief Financial Officer Branch

The operating spending, both salary and non-salary remained stable for the program across the two years at approximately $12M per year.

6.2 Observations on efficiency and economy

Increased efficiency of processes

ESDC representatives identified some measures that are likely contributing to more efficient administrative processes. For internal ESDC processes, examples included regular internal meetings that contributed to communication quality, identification of challenges, and addressing process issues and the support received from the Department. Processes highlighted for increased efficiency between ESDC and funded communities included a more simplified approval of priority setting, allowing a flat rate for Community Entity administrative costs, streamlining of the amendment process, and on-line availability of the program's terms and conditions and directives. Attempts made at improving the efficiency of community reporting included providing training to community entities for the data systems, developing various tools for reporting, and supporting online reporting.

Most key informants perceived that overall the program was assisting communities in meeting some of their needs, while making effective and efficient use of federal funds. Even where the program contributions are small relative to other funding sources, such as provincial or territorial funds, program funding was cited as effective in filling gaps or complementing other sources.

Challenges to efficiency

One area of concern noted by a few key informants was the relatively low levels of funding in the Rural and Remote stream, and questioning whether the small

amount of funding can actually contribute to any significant impacts related to homelessness. Further, this funding is going to support communities and organizations that often have significant capacity issues.

Another area of concern expressed by a few key informants was related to shifting the administration of program funds from ESDC to communities. It was noted that this shift has in essence diverted 15% of available funds for homelessness initiatives and projects into administrative costs for the Community Entities' processes. The evaluation was not able to confirm from an examination of available financial information the extent to which this shift in administration to the community level was accompanied by either a decrease in administrative costs at the Departmental level, and/or an increase in overall funding allocations to communities. Relatedly, a few provincial and territorial representatives expressed that there has been a decline in access to program information compared to when the federal government was more directly involved in delivery.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Relevance

There is a strong continued need for a partnering strategy that supports the integrated efforts of communities using new approaches to address issues of homelessness at the community level. Despite the coordinated, continuous effort that has occurred over the past 20 years to address homelessness in Canada, there remain considerable challenges. These are particularly around chronic and episodic homelessness, in addition to other vulnerable groups such as youth, women and children, and Indigenous people, all of whom are also represented to some extent within the chronic and episodic homeless population.

The program's primary focus on the chronic and episodic homeless aligns with those who are the heaviest users of the emergency shelter system. The program's design addresses many of the contributing factors to homelessness and areas of specific need including supporting approaches to addressing systemic and societal barriers to housing, provision of housing supports, and accessing health and social services within communities. Lack of affordable housing was identified as one of the primary contributing factors to homelessness in many communities and key to a successful Housing First approach. This issue is not directly addressed by the program's design and is beyond the mandate of ESDC.

7.2 Implementation

Implementation of the Housing First approach has progressed well over the initial two years of the program. Contributing factors that facilitated the implementation included the program's design emphasis on community planning and collaboration, readiness projects and transition timing, the extent to which

Housing First had already been implemented in some communities, and general acceptance of the Housing First approach. Challenges included the perceived rapid roll-out of the approach, ambitious targets, and continued lack of affordable housing in many communities.

Communication and coordination within the program is functioning well. There are numerous groups and units involved with various aspects of the program which can present challenges. However, these are being addressed to some extent through the development and/or maintenance of various communication and coordination mechanisms.

The program's requirements for monitoring and reporting are burdensome at the community level. There are a large number of monitoring and reporting requirements that are not coordinated with other funding sources at the provincial and territorial level.

7.3 Early outcomes

The emphasis on a Housing First approach has contributed to the coordination of programs and services in communities. For those who are beginning with a Housing First approach, the initial steps in coordination of programs and services has been enhanced in part through the program's ongoing emphasis on the need for diverse Community Advisory Boards and stakeholder participation, in addition to the various readiness projects that were undertaken to increase buy-in from stakeholders, and support of coordination mechanisms such as intensive case management teams. The main areas for improvement are with respect to greater coordination and alignment between the program and provincial/territorial funding priorities, definitions, and data systems.

Stakeholder participation in addressing communities' homelessness issues is assisted in part through the program's design component of encouraging communities to develop and maintain a diverse Community Advisory Board. Appropriate levels of government representation from federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictions were at times challenging. The under-representation from some important community sectors including the private sector, police and corrections, and landlord associations may impact on the effectiveness of partnerships. Another noted area of challenge is ensuring participation from people with lived experience of homelessness.

At this early stage, the program has surpassed the target of housing placements for Housing First clients housing. For example, as previously mentioned, the program aimed to place 3,000 people in longer-term housing by 2015 to 2016, but records indicate that nearly double that number were stably housed during the first two years of implementation (n=6932). Additionally, 73% of clients were placed within 90 days. The program is demonstrating early positive contributions towards increasing the financial stability and self-sufficiency for both Housing First clients, as well as non-Housing clients. For instance 46% of clients

experienced increases in social participation, and 49% of clients moved from unemployment into full-time employment. With these early indications of positive outcomes, the program is anticipated to contribute to the ultimate outcome of the prevention and reduction of homelessness.

Following from the evidence presented in this evaluation, three recommendations have been developed.

Recommendations

1) Increase flexibility under Housing First to enable the provision of Housing First interventions to a greater proportion of the homeless population beyond the episodically and chronically homeless.

Currently the Housing First approach focuses on those who are chronically and episodically homeless. The program uses a definition of "chronic" and "episodic" which is perceived by communities as relatively restrictive and at times challenging to implement at the community level. By increasing the flexibility of who can access Housing First, the program would likely achieve better alignment with community priorities and increase its reach to serve greater proportions of the homeless population who are currently not included.

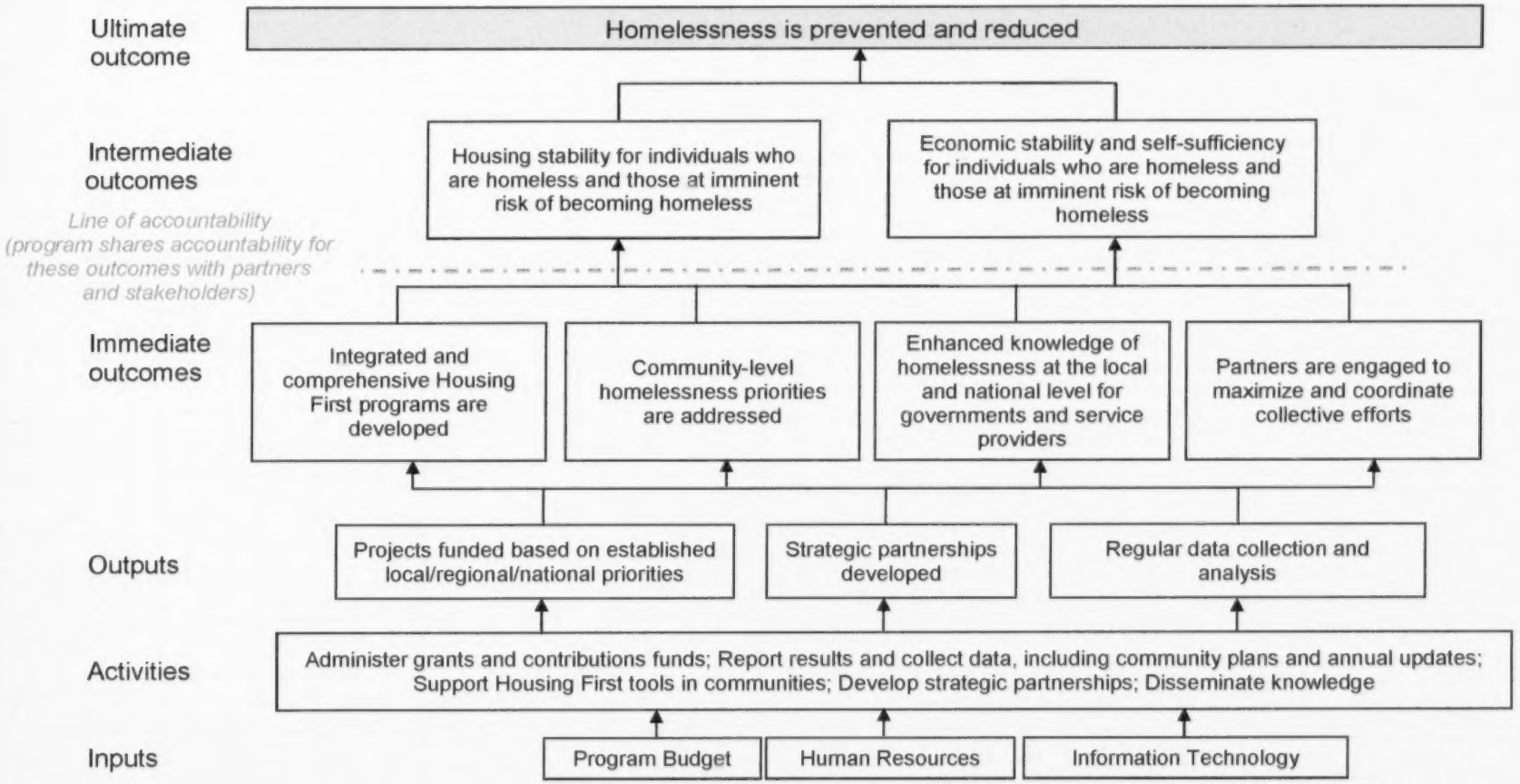
2) Further promote the participation of diverse groups on Community Advisory Boards, such as the private sector, police and correctional services, landlord associations and individuals with lived experience/experiential knowledge of homelessness.

Given the emphasis of partnerships and community planning with local solutions to homelessness, there would be some benefit in further work to ensure greater diversity of participation on community advisory boards. The evaluation found underrepresentation by some key groups. As well, greater representation on the Community Advisory Boards by individuals with lived experience of homelessness would likely enhance the relevance and quality of planning and projects.

3) Review reporting requirements in order to reduce the burden on communities to gather the necessary information to monitor and measure performance.

While reporting requirements contribute to the information available for monitoring the program and providing national level data to better understand homelessness issues in Canada, some communities are indicating that they perceive reporting as burdensome. A further review of current requirements for reporting is warranted to determine how a better balance could be achieved. Considerations may include better alignment of reporting requirements with other key partners (e.g., provinces and territories), and review and improvement of reporting templates.

Appendix 1 - Program logic model


Ultimate outcome
Homelessness is prevented and reduced
Intermediate outcomes
Housing stability for individuals who are homeless and those at imminent risk of becoming homeless
Economic stability and self-sufficiency for individuals who are homeless and those at imminent risk of becoming homeless
Line of accountability (program shares accountability for these outcomes with partners and stakeholders)
Immediate outcomes
Integrated and comprehensive Housing First programs are developed
Community-level homelessness priorities are addressed
Enhanced knowledge of homelessness at the local and national level for governments and service providers
Partners are engaged to maximize and coordinate collective efforts
Outputs
Projects funded based on established local/regional/national priorities
Strategic partnerships developed
Regular data collection and analysis
Activities
Administer grants and contributions funds; Report results and collect data, including community plans and annual updates; Support Housing First tools in communities; Develop strategic partnerships; Disseminate knowledge
Inputs
Program Budget
Human Resources
Information Technology

Appendix 2 – Evaluation questions

Evaluation question	Section of this report	Evidence source
1. To what extent is there a need for the federal government to support communities to prevent and reduce homelessness, especially among the chronically and episodically homeless?	Section 3.0	• Document and literature review • Literature review • Key informant interviews • Case studies
2. To what extent is the Homelessness Partnering Strategy effectively designed and delivered?	Section 4.0	• Document and literature review • Administrative file and data review • Key informant interviews • Case studies
3. Are Designated Communities implementing a Housing First approach?	Section 4.0	• Document and literature review • Administrative file and data review • Key informant interviews • Case studies
4. Are multiple stakeholders (e.g. provinces/territories, municipalities, voluntary sector, private sector, etc.) engaged to address homelessness?	Section 5.0	• Administrative file and data review • Key informant interviews • Case studies
5. Are programs and services in Designated Communities coordinated to reduce homelessness?	Section 5.0	• Administrative file and data review • Key informant interviews • Case studies
6. To what extent have community-level homelessness priorities been addressed?	Section 5.0	• Administrative file and data review • Key informant interviews • Case studies
7. To what extent does the Homelessness Partnering Strategy contribute to an enhanced understanding of homelessness?	Section 5.0	• Administrative file and data review • Key informant interviews • Case studies
8. Has Homelessness Partnering Strategy contributed to housing stability for homeless individuals and those at imminent risk of becoming homeless?	Section 6.0	• Administrative file and data review • Key informant interviews • Case studies
9. Has Homelessness Partnering Strategy contributed to economic stability and self-sufficiency for homeless individuals and those at imminent risk of becoming homeless?	Section 6.0	• Administrative file and data review • Key informant interviews • Case studies
10. Has Homelessness Partnering Strategy contributed to the prevention and reduction of homelessness?	Section 6.0	• Administrative file and data review • Key informant interviews

		• Case studies
11. Has the HPS implemented strategies to minimize administrative processes and resource expenditures while maximizing achievement of outcomes?	Section 7.0	• Administrative file and data review • Key informant interviews • Case studies

Appendix 3 – Evaluation methods

Multiple lines of evidence were used to inform the Homelessness Partnering Strategy evaluation, including: a literature and document review, administrative data and file review, key informant interviews and case studies. An expert on homelessness and housing was contracted to support the evaluation throughout including in the development of the evaluation methodology, literature and document review, data collection instruments and the final report.

Literature and document review
The literature and documents review included materials that are internal to the Government of Canada and material that was produced externally. The former included documents that have been produced by the program to support funding recipients and other program documents while the latter included academic research, information from provincial and territorial websites and organizational reports as well as other relevant material. The review included both peer-reviewed and grey literature.

Administrative data and file review
The administrative data and file review used data collected for the first two years of the funding period, fiscal years 2014 to 2015 and 2015 to 2016, to study the performance of the program, including the achievement of expected outcomes. The sources analysed included:

- Common System for Grants and Contributions
- Community Plans and Annual Updates
- Homelessness Electronic Reporting Information Network
- National Homelessness Information System
- Community Progress Indicators

Key informant interviews
Key informant interviews were conducted to address the evaluation questions. Groups included ESDC Homelessness Partnering Strategy personnel at national headquarters, Service Canada representatives from the various regions, provincial and territorial representatives, community representatives from Designated Communities' Community Entity and/or Community Advisory Board, and other stakeholders and experts in housing and homelessness (referred throughout as experts. Key informant groups were chosen to represent a range of views, both internal and external to the Government of Canada. A total of 53 interviews were conducted that involved 65 participants.

Case studies
The evaluation involved case studies of four communities. Case study communities were selected in consultation with the Evaluation Directorate and officials in the Community Development and Homelessness Partnerships

Directorate and the Program Operations Branch of the ESDC using the following criteria:

- two communities should be chosen from the largest eight Designated Communities and two from mid-sized Designated Communities[41]
- communities should be chosen to provide representation from across Canada
- at least one community should have a substantial Indigenous population
- all communities should be relatively close to meeting their targeted allocations to Housing First as identified in Community Plans and/or have a sizeable amount of overall funding going to Housing First

After discussion and consultation, the following communities were chosen according to the selection criteria:

- Edmonton, Alberta (one of the Big 8 communities)
- Fredericton, New Brunswick
- Hamilton, Ontario (one of the Big 8 communities)
- Victoria, British Columbia

Key informant interviews were conducted with stakeholders in each community to address the evaluation questions. A total of 32 interviews were conducted, involving 40 participants

Gender-Based Analysis Plus
A gender-based analysis plus lens was applied to the current evaluation, as is reflected in its recommendations. In particular, the needs of vulnerable socio-demographic groups, as well as gaps and promising directions for service delivery were highlighted.

[41] Excluding communities in Quebec; Quebec did not to participate in the evaluation.